



**MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
INDUSTRIAL HEALTH RESEARCH BOARD**

SICKNESS ABSENCE AND LABOUR WASTAGE

Part I. By May Smith and Margaret A. Leiper
(with the co-operation of Millais Culpin)

Part II. By Major Greenwood and May Smith

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REPORT No. 75

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PREFACE

This report is issued by the Board on the recommendation of the Statistical Committee of the Medical Research Council.

It is necessary that the reader should clearly understand its objective and the limitations of its scope.

Most people engaged in industry are aware that the evaluation of sickness rates and the determination of the financial liabilities imposed by sickness upon the State, the Employer and the Employee are tasks of great difficulty and importance, the adequate performance of which requires both much technical knowledge and access to masses of detailed information. If they have examined official reports upon the subject, they will also know that every technical term employed has a precise connotation and that conclusions are only drawn when the weight of evidence, based upon strictly homogeneous data, is very great. In such investigations it is not a question of a few hundreds or thousands of years of life at risk, but of hundreds of thousands, or even millions.

In comparison with such an analysis, the data of this report must seem meagre and the numerical results quite incomparable with rates of sickness used for other purposes. The explanation is that the authors of the report had a wholly different objective and have only refrained from using a different notation, because of a natural repugnance to coining new technical terms.

In the course of the Board's work, help is frequently invited when, in the view of employers or employed, things are not going well. There is a feeling that the workers are unhappy or that, in spite of apparently unimpeachable environmental conditions, there is too much "sickness" or "lost time." When a case of this kind has to be investigated, some sort of datum line has to be found. It is necessary to make use of information, statistical information sometimes, which would be far too vague and ill-defined to serve as a basis for calculations upon which important financial issues turned. In this work, arithmetical calculations are not an end product, but merely pointers to help the field investigator to find which part of the organisation or system should first receive attention.

The authors of the report have felt that much time might be saved, if those in industry were to have their attention directed to the compilation of records intended to be used precisely as indicators, and for no other purpose. From that point of view, classifications such as those discussed on pages 13 *et seq.*, are of importance; they would be inadmissible in a nation-wide statistical analysis. Again, in a complete statistical analysis of sickness experience, civil state, which, for a variety of reasons, has not been considered at all in the present report, and age distribution need full examination. All that has been attempted has been to help those who wish to make a preliminary survey of the position.

Similar remarks apply to the discussion of what is called Industrial Wastage. It is evident that, on a nation-wide scale, the analysis of wastage—by the methods here described—would become almost meaningless. In that sense, real “wastage,” viz., the permanent lapsing from employment, is plainly best revealed by official data, while “wastage” in the sense of passing from one firm to another, or from one department of a particular firm to another, is not of national importance. But, from the point of view of the internal economy of any one firm, this “wastage” problem *is* of serious importance and it is desirable that some simple method of measuring it should be available.

It is thought that the suggestions made and the illustrations given will be helpful to those who keep records of personnel, a responsibility not, perhaps, so seriously regarded as that of keeping particulars of merchandise.

SICKNESS ABSENCE AND LABOUR WASTAGE

I.—Sickness Absence : Its Measurement and Incidence in Clerical Work and Light Occupations. By MAY SMITH and MARGARET A. LEIPER (with the co-operation of MILLAIS CULPIN).

II.—Labour Wastage. By Major GREENWOOD and MAY SMITH.

Appendix I.—The Recording and Analysing of Sickness Absence.

Appendix II.—The Recording and Analysing of Labour Wastage.

Appendix III.—Summary of the Data Required.